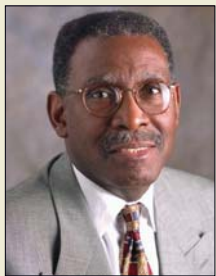


# Board Member Quotes, CRLA visit



David Hall

## On meeting the farmworkers:

"I was very impressed with one woman who was proud of the fact that the work she did allowed her to send her children to college, and to her that was very important. Through having conversations with these workers it was clear that the pride and integrity they have about their work and about their own lives reinforces how important it is to have a legal services operation to protect them when their boss isn't doing the right thing."—**David Hall**

## On the CRLA staff:

"The staff at CRLA was very impressive. They are clearly dedicated to their work, and committed to what they do. They were incredibly friendly and welcoming to us. The visit they planned was enlightening; we all learned a lot and came away with some very vivid impressions and a deeper sense of the seeming intractability of the issues that farm workers, growers, and CRLA face."—**Lillian R. BeVier**



Lillian R. BeVier

## On the growers:

"The most important thing I learned was that not all farmers treat their workers badly, and not all workers live and work in deplorable conditions. There are many law-abiding farmers who pay their workers as promised and try to take care of them. In order to stay competitive, these farmers need CRLA to enforce the law against the farmers who do not abide by the law. This is why the work of the legal services programs is so important for the farm workers. Not only does it help protect them against the farmers who might abuse their rights, it also helps the farmers who do not abuse them to stay competitive so they can continue to treat workers well."—**BeVier**

## On what more can be done to help migrant farmworkers:

"There is certainly more [legal services programs] can do, and if we had more money we could provide more resources. It is not an issue of the commitment on the part of legal services offices that serve migrant farmworkers. In regards to the quality of life workers are leading: whether they are getting paid when they are supposed to and getting paid the right amount, whether they are being protected from hazardous chemicals, etc., these are areas where legal services can make a difference, and I think the only reason we aren't addressing more of those types of problems is because of resources."—**Hall**

cant supply of migrant and seasonal farm workers. We are the nation's leader in agricultural exports and the sixth largest economy in the world. Yet farm workers, the economic engine of the agricultural economy, earn about \$10,000 a year. This makes it impossible for them to find affordable housing in many of California's agricultural cities," explains Luis Jaramillo, CRLA's Deputy Director and LSC tour organizer.

Hernandez, who clearly enjoyed talking to the Board members, went on to explain how migrant education had helped her daughters succeed academically. Her brown eyes gleamed with pride as she announced that her youngest daughter had just graduated from University of California at Davis. "All three of my girls now have college degrees. That is why I have worked in these fields, so my daughters can be professionals."

Some might argue that Hernandez's success has been aided by the three decades she has spent working for one of the best ranch supervisors in the valley, Israel Morales.

Morales, a Mexican immigrant himself, came to California over 40 years ago and toiled in the fields until he worked his way up to tractor driver. A few years later, after having learned everything he could about farm machinery, he became the head mechanic for a large grower. Eventually promoted to foreman several times over, Morales is now the supervisor of more than 4,000 acres of organic and conventional crops. A stout man with an easy smile and a light-hearted demeanor, Morales explained the unique challenges posed in selecting, planting, caring for, protecting, harvesting, transporting, and eventually selling agricultural produce. He also demonstrated for the LSC board members one of his many inventions: a tarp with a collapsible frame that protects crops more effectively than existing models. This is only one of Morales' many inven-

tions to make farm work easier for his workers. So innovative are Morales methods, such as ergonomic tools to prevent farm worker back injuries and farming methods to prevent worker exposure to pesticides (the two leading causes of health problems for farm workers), that the University of California is currently studying them.

Morales believes that caring for his workers' health and safety is nothing more than a good business practice: "growers need workers. Farm work will never be fully mechanized. I depend on good workers; our entire industry would be crippled without them."

After a long day in the fields, the LSC Board and senior staff ended their tour with a visit to the John Steinbeck Museum, which chronicles the history and contributions of the many generations of farm workers who have made this valley one of the most productive agricultural regions of the world. At the museum, Janice Morgan, a leading advocate for farm workers and the director of the Farmworker Program at the LSC-funded Legal Aid Services of Oregon, gave her evaluation of the day. Morgan described how the tour had shed light on the reality of farm workers' lives: working long hours, under difficult and dangerous conditions, for very little pay. "Farm workers are the poorest of the working poor," explained Morgan, "yet, farm workers are also the bearers of the American dream. They endure endless sacrifices with the hope their children will have better lives. The least we can do as a society is ensure their dreams are not lost to injustices."

Also not lost to the tour members was the message that federal migrant legal services funding continues to be a vital component of national legal services delivery because the human conditions of these migrant and seasonal working families, so visible on the tour, require special services. ■